

Public Hearing on Proposed Rules for Child Care Center
Thursday March 17, 2005

If elevating the quality of service provided by licensed and regulated child care facilities serving Michigan's children is a goal of this committee, and if the proposed license changes are the means toward that end, we would like to offer several points for consideration.

I am here today with other Early Childhood Education and Care Administrators representing the spectrum of public, private, non-profit, for-profit, school district based, and privately owned programs serving Michigan children.

The proposed new rule changes fail to mention the Early Childhood Administrator. As many of us in the field know, Administrators are ultimately responsible for the fiscal management, service quality, and regulatory compliance that ultimately must come together to ensure a safe, secure, and successful childcare environment by all reasonable standards.

It is through the contribution and skills of these professionals that children, parents and staff are offered lasting, quality services.

In the proposed rules, this key function is virtually ignored. Two hours of administrative training for a Director doesn't scratch the surface.

Someone who truly runs an ECEC program needs administrative training. Many have come to the profession with years of experience, service, and life-long learning.

Quality must start at the top, not at the caregiver level. Qualified, Licensed Administrators will make a greater impact on quality for an entire center and ensure that more children will be provided improved Early Childhood Education and Care.

Specific points of consideration for successful Early Childhood Education and Care programs for the State of Michigan must include not only facility licensing, but also a broader look into the support mechanisms that affect the Child Care industry in Michigan.

I offer the following ten points for consideration:

#1 Early Childhood programs need to be recognized for the current Early Childhood Education and Care services that they are already providing in licensed child care centers, homes and institutions. True early education programs begin at birth not at kindergarten.

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All unlicensed Early Childhood Education and Care locations should be terminated in our state. All Early Childhood Education and Care providers should abide by the same set of rules regardless of the location of the services being provided. All children deserve the same standard of quality of care in our state. Quality Early Childhood Education and Care are not *cheap* if they are provided properly. For the health, safety, welfare and educational success of all children we must create the same standards of services for all providers. Level the playing field! Competition is a good thing if we all play by the same rules -- all children can be winners!

#2 Early Childhood programs need direct funding from the state in order to create a consistent stable financial foundation, which can be complemented and enhanced by parent fees, FIA reimbursement, employer benefit programs, and other competitive funding opportunities. Early Childhood Education and Care Programs should receive a per child allocation each year just as school districts receive their allocation for the education they provide for K-12 children.

#3 Early Childhood programs need to pay program staff a worthy wage. Additional state funding will allow service providers to meet the challenges of staff turnovers due to sub-standard wages and benefits.

#4 Early Childhood programs need to pay Early Childhood Professional/Degreed Staff as their counter parts are paid in School Districts. Acknowledging trained educators with state allocations will increase the consistency within the early educational continuum from birth to age five.

#5 Early Childhood programs need assistance in providing health care benefits to staff.

#6 Early Childhood programs need tax relief through tax credits or other tax abatement programs (such as many small and big businesses receive in our state) for supplying training and work experience for future teachers, for community service volunteers, for senior citizens, for Work First participants, etc...

#7 Early Childhood programs need increased reimbursed fees from FIA to cover actual cost of services being provided. Early Childhood Programs should not have to subsidize FIA work program initiatives.

#8 Early Childhood programs need access to affordable required business services such as liability insurance, workers compensation, auto/bus/van insurance etc.---(as we have done with the no fault fund for drivers in our state). Many programs are insurance poor.

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#9 Early Childhood programs' teaching staff should be offered the opportunity to participate in the state contributory and matching retirement program -- which is now offered to their teaching counterparts in other educational settings.

#10 Early Childhood programs that provide comprehensive services to children, their families and their communities, should receive monetary incentive awards.

A comprehensive Early Childhood program should offer a multi-disciplinary approach for the provision of education and care for every child age birth to age five years and to offer support to their families as partners in the process of meeting the needs of all children in the state of Michigan -- leaving no child behind.

Partnerships, collaborations, and networks should be established to prevent duplication of services and to provide cost effective services for all providers.

Finally, there are many excellent Early Childhood Education and Care programs operating in Michigan. These programs are severely under-funded. The individuals who direct and run these programs are the best Michigan has to offer its youngest residents and we repay these caring Early Childhood Professionals with sub-standard wage and benefits for the incredible work they do. We know these Early Childhood Professionals are not in this field for the money - they are here for the children. It sounds a lot like the way education used to be! Let's start rewarding those who give the most to our communities by preparing our future citizens. Let's make a financial commitment to our future -- our children - by placing universal standards on anyone providing Early Childhood Education and Care in the state of Michigan -- not by generating new rules that seek to micro manage, creating excessive, burdensome, meaningless reporting for some facilities while turning a blind eye to other facilities providing the same services.

Quality demands consistency -- from the providers as well as from the regulators.

Let's provide Early Childhood Education and Care to every child in the state of Michigan regardless of race, color or creed, socioeconomic status, geographical area, physical conditions, risk factors or family situation.

Let's make a difference in the Life of a Child!

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